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SUBJECT: WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN NEPAL

REF: SECSTATE 178055

SUMMARY

¶1. On November 2, Emboff delivered reftel "Summary Recommendations of the Women's Empowerment Working Session" to Nepal's Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare Urmila Aryal. The Minister welcomed the fact sheet and provided Emboff with a list of recent legislative efforts on behalf of women's rights in Nepal. Aryal said she would review the recommendations and would provide feedback on how best to pursue them in Nepal. End Summary.

NEPAL'S LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS TO EMPOWER WOMEN

¶2. On November 2, Emboff shared the fact sheet of recommended strategies for "the political, economic, legal and educational empowerment of women worldwide," which resulted from the Secretary's September 23 working session with women Ministers and Heads of State (reftel), with Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare and Member of Parliament Urmila Aryal. The recommendations included expanding networking among women leaders, pursuing literacy and civic education programs that target women, encouraging women leaders to participate in political systems and to take on senior roles at the UN, involving more women in peace process negotiations and security-related discussions, supporting micro-finance projects to help women, and encouraging women's participation in religious and cultural dialogues. Aryal said she would review the recommendations and suggest how to best implement them in Nepal. She also agreed to attend a discussion with other leaders and Emboffs to flesh out the recommendations.

¶3. Aryal informed Emboff of the recent legislative reforms for women's rights in Nepal. She acknowledged that while improved legislation regarding women's empowerment had been adopted, the implementation of the new laws remained weak. Aryal described the women's caucus established in Parliament, consisting of the 12 female MPs in the House of Representatives (out of 205), and their efforts to raise women's issues at the party level. Noting that the April 2006 People's Movement helped increase the momentum for women's rights, Aryal referred to the proposal that the House

of Representatives passed unanimously on May 30, 2006, which pledged to reserve 33 percent of jobs in the civil service for women and to allow the registration of a child's citizenship in the name of the mother or the father, as a major milestone. This policy was part of the Civil Service Act Amendment currently under discussion in Parliament, Aryal noted. Furthermore, the Women's Development Department in the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare has developed a provision requiring district officers in charge of women's welfare, who are currently temporary staff, to be appointed for five-year terms.

¶4. In addition, Aryal reported that other Ministries were setting up laws to protect the rights of women. She said the Ministry of Local Development (MLD) had incorporated earmarks in their budget for women, children, and disabled people. According to Aryal, the MLD has set aside USD 700 for women's issues in the annual budgets for the country's 3,900 Village Development Committees (VDCs). In addition, she said the Ministry of Law and Justice had approved the creation of an autonomous Women's Commission, similar to the National Human Rights Commission. Aryal described these institutional mechanisms as necessary first steps toward achieving the political, legal and economic empowerment of women.

U.S. EFFORTS

¶5. U.S. Mission Nepal activities support the recommendations from the September 23 working session to enhance women's rights either politically, legally, economically or socially.

For example, the USAID-supported Multiparty Women's Caucus organized a series of mass rallies in July 2006 along with a number of women's rights organizations advocating for the inclusion of women in the Interim Constitution Drafting Committee (ICDC) and other newly created government bodies. These rallies contributed to the inclusion of four women members in the ICDC and two women as the heads of Parliamentary Committees. MPs Asta Laxmi Shakya of the Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) and Honorable Sabitri Bogati of the Nepali Congress (NC) are now the chairpersons of the Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee and the Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Committee, respectively. In addition, Emboffs organized a "First Wednesday Club," a monthly gathering of women leaders from all fields, which aims to increase networking across the government and civil society. The club established a shadow constitutional drafting committee to better incorporate women's concerns in the new constitution. Geeta Upraithi, the head of the Nepal Police Women's Cell, recently served on a UN peacekeeping mission and has taken part in the First Wednesday Club.

COMMENT

¶6. We agree with Minister Aryal that Nepal has made significant institutional steps toward securing the rights of women, although their implementation needs improvement. We will continue to discuss the recommendations from the Secretary's strategy session with women members of Parliament

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and others. The strategy's recommendations for more women in security positions will be an important aspect of ongoing workshops with the Nepal Army (NA) and post's work on security sector reform generally. Nepal's current political transition offers the prospect of an even greater expansion of the opportunities available to Nepalese women, and we aim to take maximum advantage of this chance.

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